

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /066 W

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R 151417Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6828

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 3358

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KE

SUBJECT: GICHURU TO CONTEST KANU CHAIRMANSHIP

REF: (A) NAIROBI 3139, (B) NAIROBI 3130

1. MINISTER OF DEFENSE JAMES GICHURU HAS ANNOUNCED PUBLICLY HIS INTENTION TO RUN FOR KANU CHAIRMANSHIP IN NATIONAL PARTY ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 3. THIS WILL PIT HIM AGAINST FINANCE MINISTER MWAI KIBAKI, WHO IS SEEKING SAME POST. FOREIGN MINISTER WAIYAKI WITHDREW FROM RACE ON MARCH 13.

2. GICHURU'S ANNOUNCEMENT CAME AS COMPLETE SURPRISE. AS OF MARCH 10, POSITION OF KIAMBU KIKUYU-LED GROUP WAS THAT GROUP'S LEADERSHIP, INCLUDING GICHURU HIMSELF, WOULD SUPPORT KIBAKI. EX-FOREIGN MINISTER MUNGAIR TOOK THIS
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LINE WITH EMBOFF ON MARCH 10 AS DID PROMINENT MP GEORGE ANYONA WHO WAS AMONG GROUP OF MP'S WHO FLANKED GICHURU WHEN HE ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY MARCH 12.

3. GICHURU'S MOTIVATION IS NOT CLEAR. MINDEF PERM SEC TOLD DCM MARCH 15 THAT HE BELIEVED GICHURU WAS PUT UP TO IT BY MUNGAIR AND MP KIIHIKA KIMANI WHO WANT

SOMEONE IN KANU CHAIRMAN JOB THEY CAN CONTROL. HOWEVER, KANU SOURCE SPECULATED TO EMBOFF MARCH 15 THAT IT WAS, IN FACT VP MOI WHO HAD SECRETLY ENCOURAGED GICHURU TO DECLARE CANDIDACY ON THEORY THAT AS CHAIRMAN HE WOULD NOT BE AN EFFECTIVE COUNTERWEIGHT TO MOI WITHIN PARTY. KANU SOURCE SAID THAT GICHURU'S ANNOUNCEMENT HAD NOT BEEN COORDINATED WITH KIAMBU GROUP'S LEADERSHIP, WHICH IS NOW ACUTELY EMBARRASSED. HE ADDED THAT DISCREET EFFORTS ARE NOW BEING MADE TO TALK GICHURU OUT OF RUNNING.

4. COMMENT: BY KENYAN STANDARDS GICHURU HAS A REASONABLE CLAIM TO HIGH NATIONAL PARTY OFFICE. TWICE IN THE PAST HE HELD AND TURNED OVER NATIONAL PARTY LEADERSHIP TO PRESIDENT KENYATTA. DESPITE HIS INEFFECTIVENESS AND MEDICAL PROBLEMS IN RECENT YEARS HE HAS REMAINED CLOSE TO KENYATTA. IN KEEPING WITH TRADITIONAL KIKUYU RESPECT FOR AGE AND POSITION, IT MAY BE THAT KIBAKI WILL HIMSELF DROP OUT OF THE RACE IF GICHURU IS NOT PERSUADED TO WITHDRAW. MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER KIKUYUS WILL PRESENT ONLY ONE CANDIDATE FOR CHAIRMAN ON APRIL 3. IF IT IS GICHURU RATHER THAN KIBAKI, PROSPECT IS THAT PARTY REVITALIZATION EFFORT WILL WITHER, AND SITUATION IN PARTY WILL REVERT TO THAT WHICH PREVAILED THROUGHOUT LAST DECADE WHEN KANU PLAYED NO SIGNIFICANT ROLE.
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